

# *A Month Dedicated to Women's History*

Lots of things have been said about women throughout history, since the earliest times, society has stereotyped women, making it almost impossible for them to achieve their goals and desires in life. Women were always treated as second place object; they were believed to be only good at having children and weren't good enough for having tasks or careers outside of the house. As years passed by, people's mind have changed enormously about women's skills to perform different duties and a person's sex is not anymore a determining factor about the type of duties or kind of job a person can have. In the 1600's, women were expected not to have any rights outside their homes but teaching their children about life, morals, and religion. Women depended on their husbands to provide for the family and to take care of them. Women were made to feel like they had no value in their community. The role of women in society was contributed by religious beliefs and the constant negative attitude that man has given them. Women were treated like they were property of men, with no voice in their own fate. Changes in the family began when women started seeking more from life, and it started happening since the very beginning of the new world.

Women had to live under man's rule. They encountered sexism everywhere since the time when the cave men pulled them around by the hair. It was not until the nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920 that women obtained the right to vote. Since then, women have finally been able to express their opinion which actually counts for something in society. They started having their own independence, making everybody change the idea of women as weak beings, as a second place object, and have made men feel threatened by their skills to perform different activities.



From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center, Rochester, N.Y.

Nowadays, we can see women holding executive positions and political offices. In most countries around the world we see women performing important roles such as politician, teachers, leaders, military officers, etc.

Women who are executives at companies have men who are working for them. Even today, in narrow minded men, there is some level of discomfort for a man who has a

woman as a boss. Women are now in the front lines of battle, close to men, fighting for their country, exactly like them.

How much independence does a person have? Independence is a state of being, not a tangible object. A person's independence is directly related to his environment. Not all men are equally independent; factors such as culture, race, economic status, and class are also factors in determining freedom.



Feminism is the theory that men and women should be equal politically, economically and socially. Thomas Jefferson said "all men are created equal", the question is what did he mean by men? If it's a female answer, the response should probably be mankind; if it's a male's response, then the answer could be somewhat different. "Jefferson wrote this famous phrase with the intention of confusing the public at a time where women's rights didn't exist", says Joseph Ellis a Jefferson Historian. Among many other things, Thomas Jefferson indirectly began a movement towards women's freedom.

Over the last twenty years, women have taken full advantage of their voting rights. It has enabled women to accomplish things they had only dreamt of. Women are now in the center of the business world and still changing a male dominate society.

## Woman's History Month



Before the 1970's, the topic of women's history was largely missing from general public consciousness. To address this situation, the Education Task Force of the Sonoma County (California) Commission on the Status of Women initiated a "Women's History Week" celebration in 1978 and chose the week of March 8 to coincide with International Women's Day.

The celebration was met with positive response, and schools began to host their own Women's History Week programs. The next year, leaders from the California group shared their project at a Women's History Institute at Sarah Lawrence College. Other participants not only became determined to begin their own local Women's History Week projects but also agreed to support an effort to have Congress declare a national Women's History Week.

In 1981, Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Rep. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) cosponsored the first Joint Congressional Resolution proclaiming a "Women's History Week."

In 1987, the National Women's History Project petitioned Congress to expand the celebration to the entire month of March. Since then, the National Women's History Month Resolution has been approved every year with bipartisan support in both the House and Senate.

Taken from: <http://womenshistorymonth.gov/about.html>

## Background

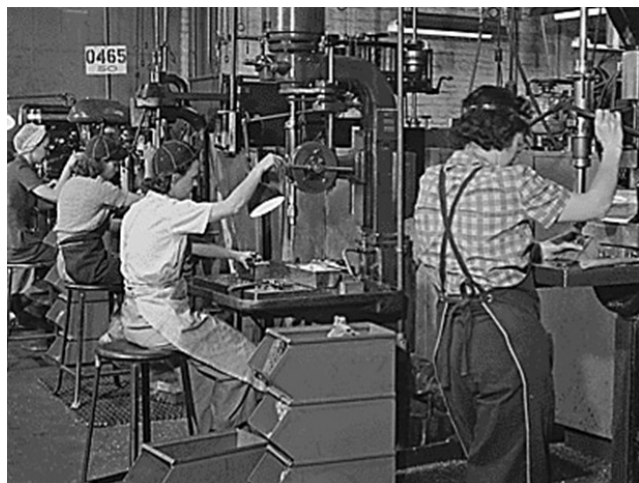
It's well known that in early societies, women bore children, took care of home, and helped to maintain the family's economic production. Men hunted, took part in wars, set up societies, and assumed primary responsibility for the field production.



Dominance of men, however, was important from the earliest times of written history, probably as a result of his discovery of the capacity of hunting and establishing warfare as status activities. Due to god-centered religions, there is the belief that women are naturally weaker and more inferior than men; St. Paul urged women to be obedient of their husbands; in Hinduism the reward of a



woman is to be born again as a man, and so on. As a conclusion, in most traditional societies, women generally had disadvantages. Their education was limited to perform domestic skills, and they didn't have access to positions of power. However, ancient Babylonia is an exception to this fact, since women had property rights.



As time passed, the situation of women changed influenced by factors as the Industrial Revolution, which caused economic and social changes, and provided a better climate for the rise of feminism.

In the United States, the Industrial Revolution represented a significant opportunity for women. They started transforming the handwork, which was always carried on at home for free, into machine-work, being part of a mass production society, acquiring the right to work receiving a salary in factories; being this the beginning of their independence. In spite of the fact that factory conditions were hazardous and their pay was lower than men's, it was legally controlled by their husbands. But in middle and upper-class, women were expected to stay at home as a symbol of their husbands' economic success. Conditions like these encouraged the feminist movement, which had leaders who were primarily educated, middle class women.

Even though the progress in the U.S. was slower, the number of working women increased after the two world wars, but still in the 1960's they encountered discrimination in many forms, and started questioning social institutions and moral values with scientific arguments suggesting that differences between men and women were not from biology, but from culture.

The objectives of the women's movements included issues such as, equal pay for equal work, federal support, recognition of lesbian rights, legislation of abortion, and attention on the problems of rape, wife and child vio-

lence, and discrimination against older and minority women, among others.

American women have made many gains in the last decade; they have become important people in politics, culture, education, and research, among others.

## History

Before 1970, women's history was rarely the subject of serious study. As historian Mary Beth Norton recalls, "only one or two scholars would have identified themselves as women's historians, and no formal doctoral training in the subject was available anywhere in the country." Since then, however, the field has undergone a metamorphosis. Today almost every college offers women's history courses and most major graduate programs offer doctoral degrees in the field.

## The Women's Movement



Two significant factors contributed to the emergence of women's history. The women's movement of the sixties caused women to question their invisibility in traditional American history texts. The movement also raised the aspirations as well as the opportunities of women, and produced a growing number of female historians. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg,

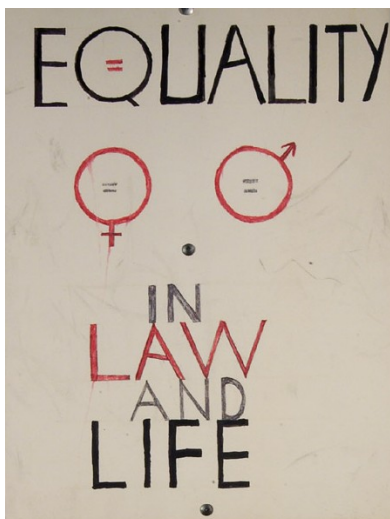
one of the early women's historians, has remarked that "without question, our first inspiration was political. Aroused by feminist charges of economic and political discrimination . . . we turned to our history to trace the origins of women's second-class status."

## New Social History

Women's history was also part of a larger movement that transformed the study of history in the United States. "History" had traditionally meant political his-

tory—a chronicle of the key political events and of the leaders, primarily men, who influenced them. But by the 1970s "the new social history" began replacing the older style. Emphasis shifted to a broader spectrum of American life, including such topics as the history of urban life, public health, ethnicity, the media, and poverty.

### The Personal Is Political



Since women rarely held leadership positions and until recently had only a marginal influence on politics, the new history, with its emphasis on the sociological and the ordinary, was an ideal vehicle for presenting women's history. It has covered such subjects as the history of women's education, birth control, housework, marriage, sexual-

ity, and child rearing. As the field has grown, women's historians realized that their definition of history needed to expand as well—it focused primarily on white middle-class experience and neglected the full racial and socioeconomic spectrum of women.

Taken from: <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/womensintro1.html>

**National Women's History Month's roots go back to March 8, 1857, when women from New York City factories staged a protest over working conditions. International Women's Day was first observed in 1909, but it wasn't until 1981 that Congress established National Women's History Week to be commemorated the second week of March. In 1987, Congress expanded the week to a month. Every year since, Congress has passed a resolution for Women's History Month, and the President has issued a proclamation.**

[http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/014522.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/014522.html)

## Women's History Month Links to Learning

### Women's history Month

<http://womenshistorymonth.gov/>

The Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Gallery of Art, National Park Service, Smithsonian Institution and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum join in paying tribute to the generations of women whose commitment to nature and the planet have proved invaluable to society.

Source: Library of Congress

Reading Level: Moderate

### World Reflects on Women's Progress, Remaining Obstacles

<http://www.america.gov/st/democracyhr-english/2010/February/20100226151511ajesroM0.3216059.html>

In March, the world observes International Women's Day, and, in the United States, Women's History Month. And while women have made great strides in many areas where they once were marginalized, there is still much work to be done in areas including education, health and gender-based violence.

Source: America.gov

Reading Level: Moderate

### Gale Group's Guide to Women's History Month

[http://www.gale.cengage.com/free\\_resources/whm/index.htm](http://www.gale.cengage.com/free_resources/whm/index.htm)

Here teachers and students can choose from a variety of activities and information. Read biographies about women or enjoy activities taken from the Women's History Month Resource Book and excerpts from Women's Rights on Trial.

Source: Gale, Inc.

Reading Level: Moderate

### History Channel

<http://www.history.com/exhibits/womenhist/>

Check the schedule as the History Channel tells the life story of a different extraordinary woman each day. Read profiles, watch a video of history-making women, or check out the special feature on women's suffrage.

**Source:** A & E Television  
**Reading Level:** Moderate

**National Women's Hall of Fame**

<http://www.greatwomen.org/women.php>

Come stand among great women as you read about history, the mission, and the women of the hall. You can even honor an extraordinary woman in the National Women's Hall of Fame Book of Lives and Legacies.

**Source:** National Women's Hall of Fame

**Reading Level:** Hard

**National Organization for Women**

<http://www.now.org/>

Learn about the history of this organization and its cur-

rent major campaigns. Read articles concerning the future of women and other important issues. Find out about how to take action and get involved by contacting your local chapter.

**Source:** NOW

**Reading Level:** Adult

*Links for Language Practice*

[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_lesson/lesson/lesson102.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson102.shtml)

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/women/>

[http://www.surfnetkids.com/womens\\_history\\_month.htm](http://www.surfnetkids.com/womens_history_month.htm)

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